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CHILE: GOVERNMENT SIGNS UN CONVENTION AGAINST TORTURE

The Chilean Government this month signed the United Nations Convention against Torture and the Inter-American Convention to Prevent and Punish Torture in order, it said, "to strengthen and perfect its respect for human rights", because it is "faithful to the Christian and humanist principles which inspire it". The government has consistently denied the use of torture.

The signing of the conventions is one of a number of positive measures introduced over the last year concerning the protection of detainees against torture. Other measures include the closing down of detention centres run by the Central Nacional de Informaciones (CNI) - state security police - and the granting of access by delegates of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to detainees held incomunicado by police.

While Amnesty International considers the measures to be a step forward, it believes that the government needs urgently to introduce further safeguards to eradicate torture effectively. In spite of the measures taken by the government, Amnesty International has continued to receive reports of torture over the last few months. Detainees have said they were tortured before, and in some cases after, ICRC delegates were allowed to visit them. Since the closure of the CNI detention centres, where torture most frequently took place in the past, reports indicate that CNI agents have been responsible for torture within detention centres run by Investigaciones, criminal investigations police. Torture is also facilitated by the fact that detainees are held incomunicado for several days after their arrest. Prolonged incomunicado detention after their transfer to prison also makes investigations into the treatment of detainees difficult.

One of the most recent cases of torture reported to Amnesty International is that of Luis Tricot, arrested on 3 September and taken to an Investigaciones police station. He said he was beaten and given electric shocks while held in police custody. After three days in

detention he was rushed to hospital with a fractured vertebra, the cause of which is not yet known.

Further safeguards which Amnesty International believes should be introduced to prevent the use of torture and protect detainees held in police custody include:

- the ratification of the conventions and their publication in the official gazette so that they are binding under Chilean law;
- the granting of access by independent lawyers and doctors to the detainees as soon as possible after their arrest, and an end to prolonged incommunicado detention;
- effective monitoring of interrogation procedures used by the police, and in particular the CNI;
- the setting up of an impartial enquiry into allegations of torture: in spite of hundreds of official complaints submitted to the courts on behalf of political detainees and evidence such as medical certificates, judicial investigations have been inconclusive and failed to lead to the identification and prosecution of those responsible.

[Note: For further information on torture in Chile see circular "Chile: 50 cases of torture Update II, AI Index:AMR 22/36/87.]